

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Event: BG David Wherley, on September 11, 2001 Commander of the 113th Wing of the USAF
Air National Guard, Andrews AFB

Type of event: Interview

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Special Access Issues

Prepared by: Philip Zelikow

Team Number:

Location: Harvard, Boston, MA

Participants – BG David Wherley, USAF

Participants - Commission: Philip Zelikow, Ernest May

On 8/28/03 I taught a pair of classes in an executive program at Harvard. General Wherley was a student in the program and introduced himself to me, explaining his relationship to the 9/11 story and volunteering the information indicated below. Ernest May was present during this conversation.

On 9/11 General Wherley was on active duty, commanding the 113th Wing of the USAF Air National Guard. This is the Guard wing for Washington, DC, based out of Andrews AB. Watching the images on TV that morning he went from his office to the Wing's communications center.

Shortly after the plane hit the Pentagon, agents from the Secret Service contacted the Wing for help. Wherley called the JOC while watching TV footage of employees evacuating the White House complex. Wherley finally got through on the phone to an agent, Ken Beauchamp, on the presidential protective detail. He knew Beauchamp from other routine work with the Wing. Beauchamp asked the commander to send up aircraft to protect Washington. Wherley wanted to help but asked, with all respect, to "speak to someone a little higher up the food chain."

Wherley then talked to another Secret Service agent, Becky Editor. Speaking for the Vice President, she asked General Wherley to put aircraft over DC with orders to intercept any aircraft that approached within any 20 miles of the city and turn that aircraft around. If the aircraft would not change course, the interceptor should use "any force necessary" to keep that aircraft from crashing into a building. Wherley asked if there was anybody in a uniform around there he could talk to. Editor alluded to a Navy captain who was busy on other matters, but said no one was available. Wherley felt the instructions were not in military terms, but were understandable enough.

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He had some questions about rules of engagement and finally talked to an agent (possibly Editor, this was unclear) who was standing next to the Vice President and confirmed that the planes were free to engage if the aircraft could not be diverted. Again, this seemed clear enough to Wherley, which he interpreted as "weapons free."

Wherley had no properly armed planes at Andrews. His units were not air defense units. But, getting reports about a possible aircraft coming up the river toward Washington, he sent up a fighter aircraft that had just come in. That plane went up briefly, but had only about 10 minutes worth of fuel left and soon returned. Wherley recalled that this incoming aircraft was a false alarm - he thought it might have turned out to be a rescue helicopter of some kind.

Wherley ordered a pair of aircraft into the air, with an experienced squadron commander as the lead pilot. The lead pilot would decide whether or how to engage any intruder under the rules of engagement Wherley had received from the Secret Service and the Vice President. This pair of planes was effectively unarmed except for "training bullets" that would be used on a range.

All of this was separate from NORAD. But when Wherley's planes got up, they communicated effectively with the NORAD planes that had already arrived over Washington (from Langley AB). The Guard planes stayed low, where their radios could communicate effectively with Washington Approach. The NORAD planes stayed high, at or above 20,000 feet, and were getting their information through NEADS. Wherley thought the NORAD interceptors were aware of UA 93, but it took some time to learn that UA 93 had crashed - perhaps an hour after the fact.

The NORAD planes had the advantages of being properly armed and they had good situation awareness because of their altitude. But the Guard planes had the advantage of solid, reasonably clear information on the rules of engagement, while NORAD had different, unclear information on ROEs that NORAD was still sorting out. The Guard planes also had better communications with Washington Approach, which was the best source of radar data on possible threats. Fortunately, thanks to training, Wherley felt the Guard and NORAD pilots actually in the air did a good job of interacting directly with each other so that either pair of aircraft could be ready for any contingency.

Wherley said there are tapes of at least some of the communications with these aircraft that day.

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9/11 Personal Privacy

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